

# *Sketch*

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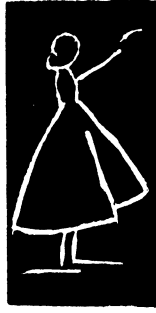
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## ”Long Ago and Far Away”

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## “Long Ago and Far Away”

*By Richard Hull, '37*

I'M NOT what you might call serious-minded, not one of these fellows who soak up art and talk about culture or go in for symphonies or reading poetry. I don't mean to say I'm a “flea-brain,” but I'm certainly no bookworm, and, in the normal course of events, I don't worry much about that sort of thing. I like to get out with the fellows and gals, to “swing it” a bit, to do a little work and have a little fun—just another college Joe, I guess.

But about two nights ago it was different for a little while, and ever since I've been thinking pretty hard and remembering a lot. In fact I darn near made a fool of myself after listening to one of these boys on a late NBC program read a scrap about “I love thee, let me count the depths and ways. . .”—anyway something like that—you know, with a guy playing the organ and a gal's trio in the background. I'm not much for this sentiment stuff most of the time; so that's off the record.

Then I dropped into Dave's place with my roommate. Dave is just a bit the long-haired type—runs practically a straight

"A", tears off to Des Moines whenever a hot-shot violinist comes along—all that sort of stuff. He's a good boy—don't get me wrong—but sort of what you might call an intellectual. He was ploughing through a "gloomy gus" philosopher when we came over. Schopenhauer was the name—hated women and hated fun, I guess. Dave read us something he said about pleasure being relief from pain, and we got to arguing about it, and after a while we went down for a beer. Well, we argued some more; then Dave and Cal—that's my roommate—went off somewhere, and I went home.

Then I turned on the radio, and this NBC man booms out with the poetry, and I felt kind of funny. I'm no woman-hater—not like that Schopenhauer fellow Dave was talking about—in fact I'm pretty doggone far from being a woman-hater, but it's been a long time since I've thought of a gal as anything but a "good egg," to take to a dance or to romance with a little. But for some darn reason—that music and everything—I got to thinking about Helen, and, like I said, remembering a lot.

I'M a senior now in this man's college; so it must have been almost six years ago the thing started, away back in high school when I was a junior, and Helen was a sophomore. Laugh, if you want to, but this was something different—yeah, I know that's what all the boys say, but this was no high school romance. It lasted longer, anyway, almost four years, and I'm still bothered—so what?

We did pretty well together—so well, in fact, I think it worried her folks and mine. They sort of figured, I think, that we might pull a secret marriage or an elopement, and they'd have to send out late wedding announcements and tell people, "Yes, we knew it all the time," but that never panned out. Maybe they feel better—I don't know.

We liked the same things—Helen and I—kind of clicked. Maybe we'd argue all night about politics, or chase down to "Ben's" for hamburger or chili, or maybe we'd just sit. She

wasn't one of these gals who thought a guy had to chatter all the time. Maybe we'd dance half an evening and not say anything.

I don't know whether we ever did actually plan on getting married—a fellow doesn't think about those things in black and white at that age, but it seemed like we'd just go on and on—I never thought about our stopping, and I don't think Helen did then either.

Well, it did stop!

When I think back I don't see just how or why it should have. Maybe I was a fool, and maybe she was. Maybe we were both too stiff-necked, and maybe it was just one of those things. It hurt a lot at first; in fact, it hurt for a darn long time, but after a while I sort of took it for granted.

You see I was a year ahead of her in high school, and I pulled out with a diploma while she was still burning the books—she could burn 'em too. Class valedictorian—not that it matters.

**A**NYWAY I graduated. We had a lot of fun that summer, swimming and riding and dancing. Then the last part of the summer I went out West for about six weeks and didn't see her again until school had started.

I got some crazy idea—you know how a guy gets twisted up once in a while—some crazy sense of honor or something. I figured I shouldn't be spoiling her last year of school—dating her too much—that is, the regular dates to school dances and parties and such—I couldn't go to them, being out of school. So I sort of laid off. Don't ask me why; I don't know. She thought it was kind of funny, and I didn't explain very well—I'm not good at that.

Well, another year rolled down the line. Meanwhile I'd gotten a job pumping gas and checking oil and what not in the Standard Oil filling station across from the drug store.

She went away that summer after getting her diploma—she was valedictorian, like I said. She was gone almost all sum-

mer, and I hardly saw her. We wrote letters, but I'm not very good at pushing a pen; so that didn't help matters much. I guess after she got back I only saw her a couple of times before she went off to college. Where? Oh, she went to Midlands, kind of a snooty place but O. K. if you've got the dough, I guess. Her old man had some—not too much, but enough.

We wrote sometimes, but like I told you, I'm not very good at writing. I was looking forward to seeing her, though, at Christmas time.

She finally came home, and I saw her—looking just as swell as ever and a thousand times sweeter. I didn't get to see her as much as I liked—had to work at the filling station nights. She may have acted a little funny, but I never thought much about it. Figured we were both kind of tired. I knew I was. All in all I had a pretty good time. It seemed maybe like school had gone to her head just a little, but I wasn't sure. Thought maybe I was wrong—sticking around the old home town in a smelly oil station too much or something.

Well, that winter I set out to try a little "collitch" myself. I'd saved a few bucks from pumping gas and got me a job at the "Institution." I began cracking the books—it had been darn near a year and a half since I'd done that—never worried very hard about 'em anyway—so it kind of had me going, but I was getting along somehow.

**A**BOUT the middle of the winter, Cal and his gal and I decided we'd whirl down to Midlands and see Helen. She was still writing letters, but I'd been a little griped. They sounded just like ones my sister would write—if I had a sister—and that wasn't like Helen. So we rented a car and tore down there one week end.

Well, Helen—was Helen, all right—anyway she looked like Helen—but she'd really gotten a load of college. Sophisticated stuff—had to have her cigarettes—I didn't like it then—don't mind gals smoking now—talked sorority, sorority all the time. The Kappa Gamma Deltas this and the Kappa Gamma Deltas that. All right for dessert, but not much to make a meal on.

Then she pulled this aloof stuff—friendly, but reserved. Nothing you can yell about, but plenty griping.

I kissed her goodbye in the chapter house hall—house-mother was looking too, and I don't think Helen liked it much, and for once, I didn't either. We rode back, not saying much. Cal and the girl friend weren't talking, and I didn't feel like talking either. Just before we dropped Cal's girl off she said she thought she ought to tip me off—that Helen had another "heart interest" or something. Don't remember how she said it, but the idea was to let me down easy. I didn't fall that way though—I bounced plenty!

And so that was that, until the next summer. She wrote some more sisterly letters, but I didn't care much after that.

ONE afternoon that summer I called her up. Cal was down, and I thought we might whip up to the lake for a little picnic. The moon was doing pretty well those nights, and I figured it might help me. Seems like I needed some help. She was busy with some darn sorority rushing letters and didn't warm up to the proposition right away, but finally she said it was O. K. I forgot to say we'd been dating a very little after we'd gotten home. I got a date for Cal, and we whirled up there about six one evening. We burned a few steaks, and absorbed a little lemonade; the moon was still doing all right, and the lake was just like a piece of ripply silver, but the evening didn't seem to jell. No, Helen wasn't snooty. In fact she was darn nice—maybe that's what got me. We sat there for a while, not talking a lot, and finally somebody suggested we go home. "We done so," as Bob Burns would say, nobody talking, the car purring along sweetly enough, but the evening tasting plenty bad.

I dropped Cal's date and left him at the drugstore, and then Helen and I went down to her place. We sat in the car for a while not saying anything, and then went up on the porch where we stood for quite a while, still not saying much. Finally I got sore and asked her what the deal really was.

And thinking about it now, I guess she didn't know any more than I did. She just hadn't made up her mind.

"Well, Bob's coming down to see me later this summer," she said, "and. . ."

Then I asked her if I was just runner-up in this contest, and then she felt sorry and tried to explain or soothe me or something.

I blew up all of a sudden, tore off the porch, and slammed the screen door, yelling back that I was sorry I'd bored her.

I can still see her standing in the door, half-crying. "Oh, but you didn't," was what she said. I can still remember it, "Oh, but you didn't."

Well, I didn't go back; I picked up Cal downtown, and we went home to bed, and that was that.

I'VE only seen her a couple of times since, just to say "hello."

Neither of us pulled any sulk. I felt funny as hell inside, each time—all twisted up, but I couldn't stop and talk.

Like I told you, it hurt for a long time, hurt plenty, and then I got to sort of taking it for granted, still feeling blue and low when her birthday came around, and Christmas. Then Dave read that the other night about hating women, and pleasure being relief from pain. I heard that NBC organ program with the poetry, and I began thinking pretty hard and remembering a lot and feeling funny all over again.

I sort of wondered if Helen heard that program, or, if she did—if it mattered.

